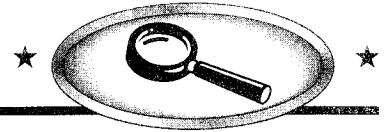


★ **Enrichment Activity 8****Two Views on Native Americans**

American settlers developed strong opinions about the Native Americans they encountered as they moved west. The following excerpts from the writings of George Armstrong Custer and President Rutherford B. Hayes present two views

from the 1870s. Custer was a Civil War hero who went west and was killed fighting the Sioux and Cheyenne peoples at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Hayes became president in 1877. His attitude reflects that of many easterners of the time.

DIRECTIONS: Read the excerpts below, and then answer the questions that follow.

★ **Custer**

... It is to be regretted that the character of the Indian as described in Cooper's¹ interesting novels is not the true one. ... Stripped of the beautiful romance with which we have been so long willing to envelope him, transferred from the inviting pages of the novelist to the localities where we are compelled to meet with him, in his native village, on the war path, and when raiding our frontier settlements and lines of travel, the Indian forfeits his claim to the appellation of the "*Nobel red man*." We see him as he is, and, so far as all knowledge goes, as he ever has been, a savage in every sense of the word; not worse, perhaps, than his white brother would be similarly born and bred, but one whose cruel and ferocious nature far exceeds that of any wild beast of the desert. That this is true no one who had been brought into intimate contact with the wild tribes will deny.

- (1) James Fenimore Cooper wrote two novels about Native Americans, *The Deerslayer* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, among other works.

From *My Life on the Plains* by General George Armstrong Custer (written in 1872)

Hayes

... The Indians are certainly entitled to our sympathy and to a conscientious respect on our part for their claims upon our sense of justice. They were the original occupants of the land we now possess. ... Many, if not most of our Indian wars have had their origin in broken promises and acts of injustice upon our part, and the advance of the Indians in civilization has been slow because the treatment they received did not permit it to be faster and more general. We can not expect them to improve and follow our guidance unless we keep faith with them in respecting the rights they possess, and unless, instead of depriving them of their opportunities, we lend them a helping hand.

... The faithful performance of our promises is the first condition of a good understanding with the Indians. ... Especial care is recommended to provide for Indians settled on their reservations cattle and agricultural implements, to aid them in whatever efforts they may make to support themselves, and by the establishment and maintenance of schools to bring them under the control of civilized influences. I see no reason why Indians who can give satisfactory proof of having by their own labor supported their families for a number of years, and who are willing to detach themselves from their tribal relations, should not be admitted to the benefit of the homestead act and privileges of citizenship, and I recommend the passage of a law to that effect.

From *First Annual Message to Congress* by President Rutherford B. Hayes (given in 1877)

★ Enrichment Activity 8 (continued)

Questions to Consider

1. How does Custer view Native Americans?

2. How does President Hayes view Native Americans?

3. What is President Hayes's goal for Native Americans?

4. **GO A STEP FURTHER ►** Imagine that you are a leader of a Native American group. You must respond to the statements made by President Hayes. In your response, comment on the attitude of General Custer.
